R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 020 982 UD 005 729

SOMETIMES IT GOT WILD IN ARKANSAS.

BY- EGERTON, JOHN

PUB DATE DEC 66

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.28 5P.

DESCRIPTORS- *TEACHER EDUCATION, *RURAL AREAS, *DISADVANTAGED YOUTH, RURAL SCHOOLS, FEDERAL PROGRAMS, PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS, TEACHERS, PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS, FEDERAL AID, NATIONAL TEACHING CORPS, ARKANSAS

THIS ARTICLE DISCUSSES THE NATIONAL TEACHING CORPS TRAINING PROGRAM IN ARKANSAS, WHICH CONSISTS OF 24 INTERNS AND 9 MASTER TEACHERS, SEVERAL ECONOMISTS, PSYCHOLOGISTS, SOCIOLOGISTS, ELEMENTARY EDUCATION SPECIALISTS, COUNSELING SPECIALISTS, AND AN AUDIOVISUAL EXPERT. FOR 10 WEEKS THE GROUP HELD A SEMINAR ON THE EDUCATION OF THE DISADVANTAGED, CONCENTRATING ON THE EDUCATIONAL, ECONOMIC, SOCIOLOGICAL, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS AND PROBLEMS OF STUDENTS FROM POOR FAMILIES. IN THE FIELD, TWO TEAM LEADERS OPERATED AS "CIRCUIT RIDERS," SUPERVISING INTERNS IN MORE THAN ONE SCHOOL. THE CORPSMEN WORKED AS COUNSELORS AND TUTORS OF INDIVIDUAL CHILDREN RATHER THAN AS CLASSROOM TEACHERS. THE NEED TO ESTABLISH ONE-TO-ONE RELATIONSHIPS WAS CONSIDERED PARAMOUNT. CORPSMEN NOT PREVIOUSLY ELIGIBLE WERE GRANTED EMERGENCY TEACHING CERTIFICATES. NEW PRACTICES AND IDEALISM WERE BROUGHT BY THE CORPSMEN TO OUTLYING SCHOOL DISTRICTS WHOSE EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS ARE MANIFOLD. THIS ARTICLE WAS PUBLISED IN "SOUTHERN EDUCATION REPORT," VOLUME 2, NUMBER 5, DECEMBER 1966. (DK)

05729

ED020982

SOMETIMES IT GOT WILD IN ARKANSAS

By John Egerton

"We're confused," said T. O. Adams, and the four teachers who sat in a semicircle beside his desk nodded in agreement. It was a bright October morning at the 12-grade, 300-pupil Nemo Vista School in the foothills of the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas. What confused Supt. Adams and his four elementary teachers (who are collectively responsible for 150 pupils in six grades) was the National Teacher Corps —more specifically, the four Corpsmen at Nemo Vista. The man to whom they expressed their confusion was Dr. William H. Osborne, director of the Teacher Corps training program at Arkansas State Teachers College in nearby Conway.

John Egerton, a staff writer for Southern Education Report, *spent several days with the people of the Teacher Corps in Arkansas for a first-hand report.*

Dr. Osborne had come to Nemo Vista to "put out a fire," and he listened attentively as Adams and the teachers described the flames. There seems to be no correlation between our efforts and those of the Corpsmen, they said. Why are they taking individual students out of class? Why can't they take over some classes and relieve the load on us? Why all this testing?

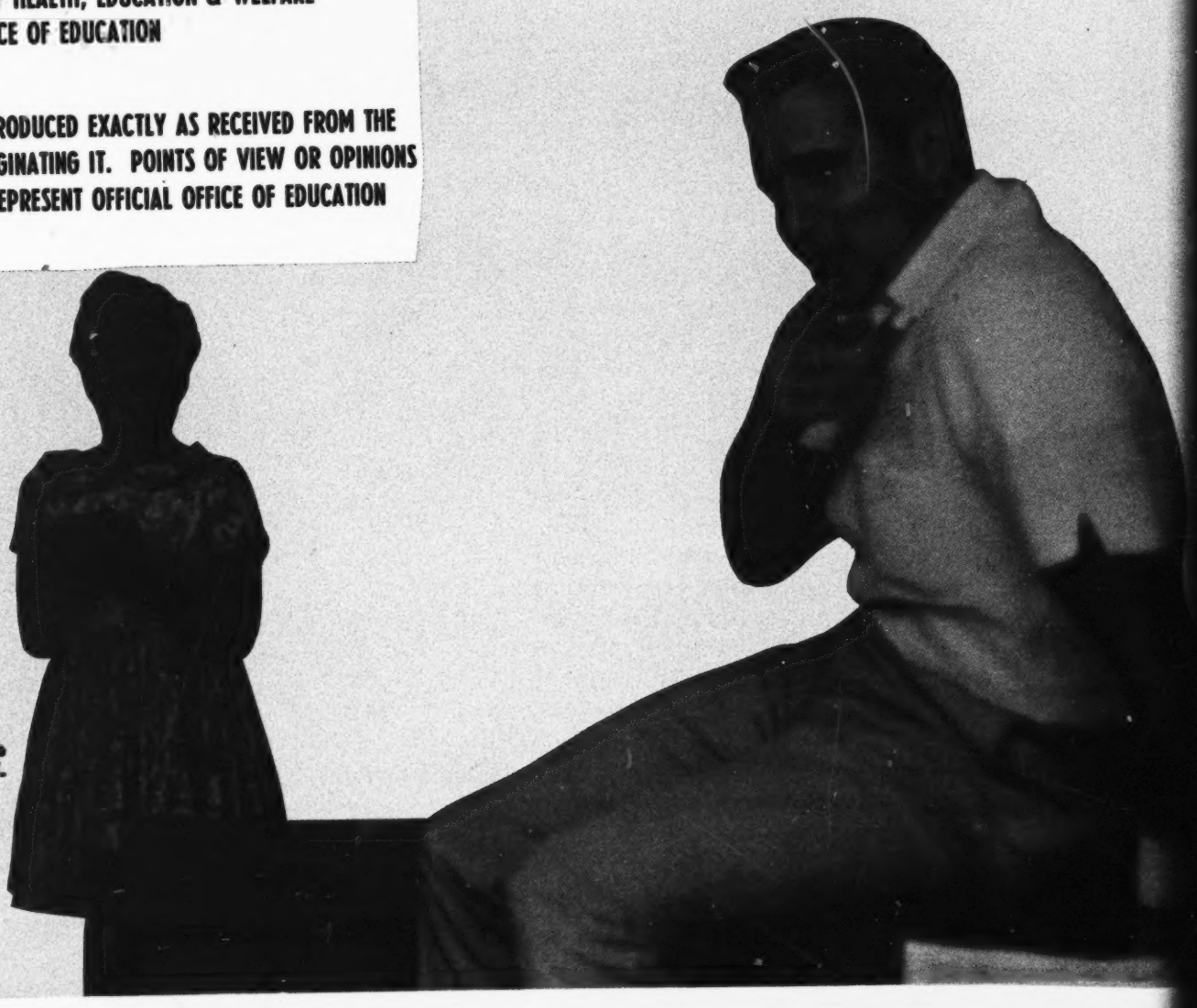
When they had finished, Bill Osborne responded with an explanation and defense of the Teacher Corps. "This is a training program," he said. "These people are interns, not teachers. We're gathering information to find ways of improving teacher training and helping disadvantaged youngsters. They're supposed to be working with you in a field experiment, to become better classroom teachers in the future. I can appreciate your confusion. This program got started too quickly, without enough planning, and as a result we've made a lot of mistakes. But things are getting better. The Corpsmen can't take over classes because they're not ready. They're working on individual problems which you yourselves have identified. Don't expect immediate results. Let them work with a child in reading, for example, and when they find out what his problems are, let them report to you what they've found.

"As for the testing, forget it. Now that we're under way, we can use other means of determining special need; we can work on problems manifested in the classroom. With time, this program will grow and change, and the interns will get to more kids, but it will never be a volume process. Let them get to know children as individuals, and then the dialogue with you will come."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

UD005729



Teacher Corpsman Tom Johnson and one of his charges. He says he works on self-concept the most.

Some of the tension had lifted. T. O. Adams shrugged his shoulders and said, "Confusion is nothing new to me. All the federal programs are like this." Then he smiled faintly and added, "What you've said about the testing relieves me a great deal." One of the teachers, apparently satisfied with Osborne's explanation, said, "Well, I guess experience is the best teacher."

"Yeah," Osborne replied, "and we've had some wild experiences." Everybody laughed, and the "fire" was out.

For the past three months, Bill Osborne has been putting out such fires in 11 Arkansas schools scattered between Little Rock and the Oklahoma border. His Teacher Corps training program at Arkansas State last summer was one of 42 in the United States and the 24 interns and 9 master teachers (team leaders) who make up his platoon of Corpsmen are among the 1,200 who remain in one of the most controversial of the new federal education programs of the Great Society.

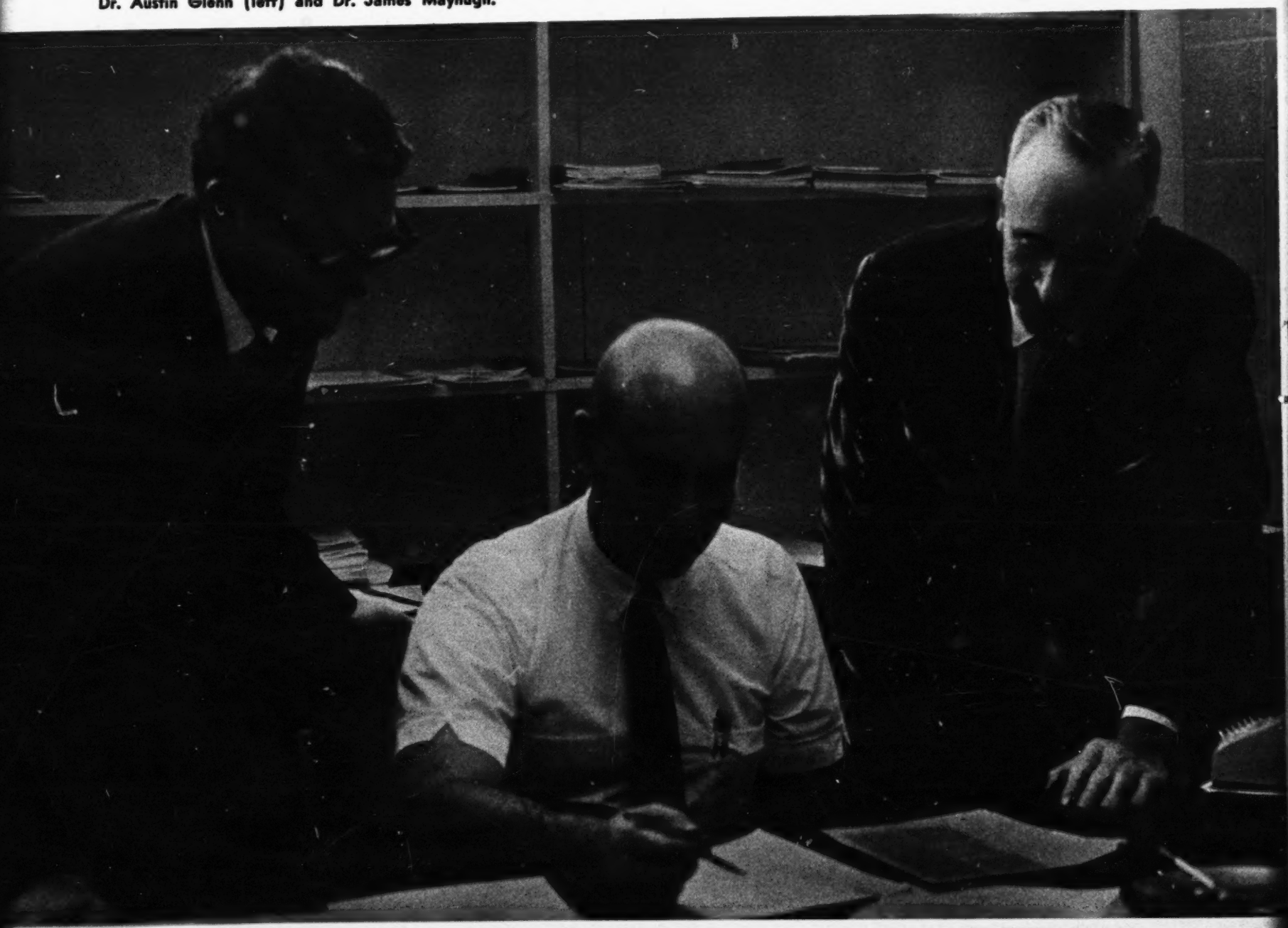
There is considerable disagreement in education and in the Congress over why and how the Teacher Corps got started, what its objectives are, what it should be doing and what its future will be (see box, Page 14). To see what it actually is doing, it is helpful to take a close look at one of the 42 programs, and the one in Arkansas, considered by Washington officials of the Teacher Corps to be among the best, is a good place to look.

Dr. Osborne first became interested in the Teacher Corps at a meeting he attended on the subject in Texas a year ago, and when he was asked last April by the U.S. Office of Education to submit a proposal for Arkansas State (where he is director of research), he got permission from the college administration to devote full time to the project. A grant of $170,000 to train 30 interns and 6 master teachers was approved by USOE, but Congress was late in appropriating the funds and it was not until June 4—two days before the program was to start—that Osborne received assurance that the money was on its way.

Largely because of his own enthusiasm for the project, Osborne earlier had recruited and screened 10 men and 26 women — all from Arkansas— to fill his first class. They included six master teachers selected from the 11 schools approved for use of Teacher Corps teams. Nineteen members of the training class were 1966 graduates of Arkansas State, seven others were recent graduates of predominantly Negro Arkansas AM & N College.

Osborne couldn't contract with faculty members

Dr. William H. Osborne (seated), director of the Teacher Corps training program at Arkansas State Teachers College, with staff assistants Dr. Austin Glenn (left) and Dr. James Mayhugh.



for his program until money was in hand, so he was unable to get any members of his own college's staff. Consequently he began looking elsewhere, and after a series of phone calls to friends and friends of friends he came up with two economists, two psychologists, two sociologists, two elementary education specialists, two counseling specialists and an audio-visual man. "I hit a gold mine," Osborne now says. "My pleas to them were of necessity so uncertain that I knew I was either getting a bunch of odd balls or some people willing to take a risk. It turned out to be the latter."

They came from campuses in Illinois, Florida, Texas, Mississippi and Oklahoma; only one, besides Osborne himself, was from Arkansas. They were paid $225 a week plus room and board, and for 10 weeks they ran, as a team, a free-wheeling, highly unstructured seminar on education of the disadvantaged. It was like nothing the students (and most of the faculty) had ever experienced before.

Beginning at 9 each morning and continuing until at least 3 each afternoon, the 12 faculty members and 36 students worked together on the educational, economic, sociological and psychological characteristics and problems of school children from poor families. Three-fourths of the students and all but two of the faculty lived in campus dormitories, where discussions often continued into the night. The program included a wide variety of methods—case work, group presentations, Socratic dialogue, role playing, field work in a Head Start program. Through it all, morale was high and there was a maximum of give-and-take on a first-name basis.

Much of the summer's activity was video-taped in candid-camera fashion, and these tapes were frequently replayed for what Osborne called "intensive criticism in a non-threatening manner." The most effective tapes recorded each student in a personal interview with a girl posing as an embittered student threatening to drop out of school. In the latter stages of training, video tape was used for a technique called micro-teaching—filming of a student in a tutoring or counseling situation, followed by analysis, advice, a model presentation of the same situation and finally a refilming of the student in a second try.

At the end of each week, the students were told to write critiques of the program; these were then studied by the faculty and adjustments were made in the next week's presentation. This kind of flexibility often resulted in a completely new approach.

While they were in training, the interns were paid $75 a week plus $15 for each dependent, and they each earned 12 hours of graduate credit toward a master's degree. The master teachers were paid a flat $125 a week.

The lack of planning preceding the start of the Teacher Corps, its abrupt — and late — beginning and its uncertain status ever since have contributed to the kinds of problems Osborne and his staff have faced. Osborne ended up spending only $97,000 of the $170,000 allocated for his program; the rest was turned back. In the 42 training programs combined, about $2 million of the $9.5 million appropriated by Congress had to be returned, primarily because of a lower-than-expected enrollment resulting from the late start. In the midst of the training period, Osborne was notified that his class would be enlarged to 40 interns and 10 leaders, but the transfers he was told to expect never arrived. No students dropped out of the program, but two were dropped at the end of the training period, two interns were elevated to team leaders on the basis of their experience and leadership ability, two interns transferred out to another training site and a leader and an intern were transferred in. When all the shifting was over, Osborne ended up with 24 interns and 9 master teachers.

In two significant ways, the Arkansas program differs from the others around the country: First, two of its team leaders are operating as "circuit riders," supervising interns in more than one school. And second, all of its Corpsmen are working as counselors and tutors of individual children, rather than as classroom teachers.

This second principle reflects a theory Osborne fully accepts. He made the "one-on-one" approach the major emphasis of the training program, and he is outspoken in his defense of it. "The remedial approach to helping children with problems is just trying again what has already failed," he says. "You have to get to know the child as a person. Can he listen? How many words does he know? How about his parents? How does he feel about school? You have to meet him on a personal level, and you can't do it in class, even a small one, unless you're an exceptional teacher. I'm trying to prove a point: by concentrating on one student, these people [Teacher Corpsmen] will learn to come to grips with problems children have in learning, and when they get to be classroom teachers they'll see their students as individual people instead of an impersonal group.

"Teachers are overworked, sure. But I ask them, 'How much different, how much better would you be be if you only had five students?' I'm afraid most of them would be just the same. They have the world's best rationalization: they don't have time to help the individual. And the colleges are at fault, too. We run teacher training programs on a mass production scale, without giving our students any appreciation of children or any understanding of the child who is sitting in front of them."

As the training program in Arkansas drew to a close, Osborne thought most of his problems were over. He had overcome uncertainties about funding and kept all his faculty and trainees intact for a stimulating and productive summer of preparation; he had successfully instilled in the Corpsmen a commitment to the "one-on-one" approach to teaching; and he had compensated for the lack of a full contingent of Corpsmen by assigning his trainees in such a way that all 11 schools which had requested them would have at least one, and three schools got full teams of four interns and a leader.

But the trouble had only started. By the first of September, the Teacher Corps appeared to be on its death bed in Congress. The Senate had taken no action at all on the Corps' 1966-67 appropriations request and the House Appropriations Committee had voted to deny the agency's request altogether. A continuing resolution adopted by Congress allowed the Corps to complete its training programs, but it specified that "no commitments of any kind" could be made by the Corps "with respect to assignment of any teacher to teach in any school."

Osborne and the other project directors were left holding the bag. Their platoons of Corpsmen could not be paid more than the subsistence wages they had received during the summer, and they were in danger of ending up with no jobs at all. Osborne, reasoning that his Corpsmen were trained as counselors, not teachers, went ahead and assigned them to the schools.

Other project directors apparently did the same. The House Appropriations Subcommittee which earlier had considered (and rejected) the Teacher Corps fund request promptly launched an investigation into what Rep. Edith Green of Oregon called "serious questions of violations of the law." Within hours, Osborne was visited by two FBI agents. "They came to see if we were adhering to the intent of the joint resolution," he says. "At that point I hadn't even heard of the resolution."

Two days later the agents left, apparently satisfied that the Corpsmen were not being paid more than their training allowances, and that they were not conducting classes. Nothing more was heard by Osborne on the subject.

It was not until the last week in October that both houses of Congress finally agreed on release of the $7.5 million the Corps now has to tide it over until next July. For his part, Bill Osborne has not had time to worry about the future of the Corps beyond that date. His Corpsmen are now being paid with federal funds by the schools in which they are working, at the going rate for teachers with their training and experience. Osborne is exploring the possibility of preparing additional trainees to bring his group to full strength (40 interns, 10 leaders), and he is anxious to prove his point about the value of one-to-one teaching.

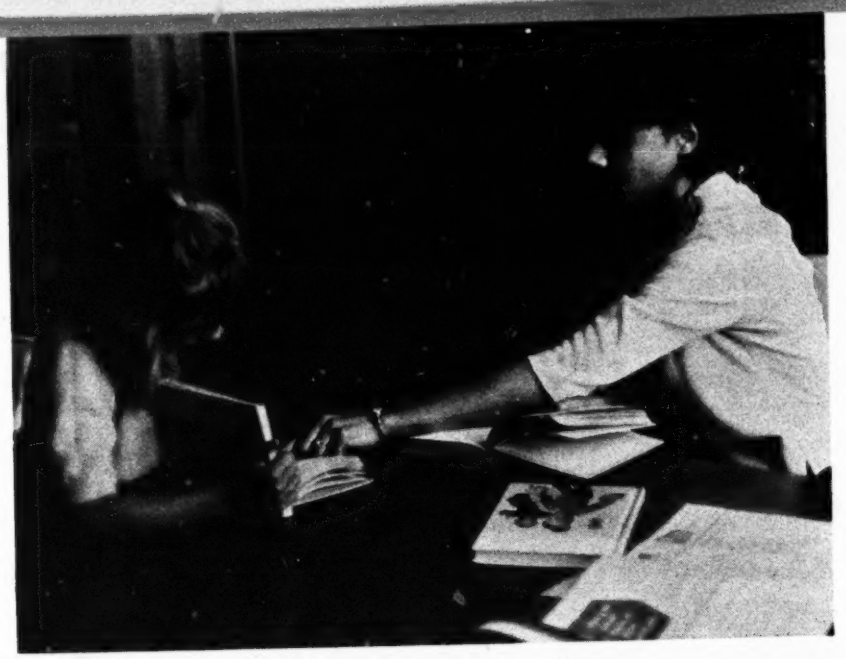
For all its troubles, the Arkansas Teacher Corps project has made some notable gains. It has brought into the teaching profession, in addition to young people with some teacher training, a few housewives, retired military personnel and other adults with college degrees but no courses in professional education and no teaching experience, and Osborne believes these people, with preparation such as they received last summer, can fill a big void in teacher ranks. He has had full co-operation of the Arkansas State Department of Education, which granted emergency teaching certificates to all Corpsmen who have not cleared all of the hurdles to certification. At the end of two years—if the Corps lasts that long—Osborne's trainees will have earned master's degrees (tuition-free) and teaching certificates by attending two summer training programs, taking six hours of class work in their spare time each semester, and attending Saturday seminars at Arkansas State during the school year.

The program has also brought to the fore a latent idealism in its trainees. "That tremendous summer adventure opened my eyes to a lot of things about disadvantaged children," says one of them. Another Corpsman believes she will "do 10 times better as a classroom teacher after this," and still another says, "Before this experience, I think most of us would have shied away from teaching in a school with lots of deprived kids. Now we would choose that kind of assignment."

In every instance, the Arkansas Corpsmen are working individually with from three to nine elementary-school students who have been singled out by their teachers for special help. The Corpsmen could be called counselors, tutors, generalists (as opposed to specialists), even supplementary teachers, but they are not classroom teachers. Their overriding interest is in the individual and his problems, and they consider their job primarily one of helping these children develop a healthy self-concept. They like to talk about changing attitudes. Taking together the comments of a dozen Corpsmen, here is a composite summary of how they picture their task:

"The permanent effect of all this depends to a great degree on the home. We have to go to the parents, because they won't come to the school. The PTA is, in their eyes, a social function for the upper crust. We have to take the PTA into the homes. And maybe the concern we express for the individual student will spread to the teachers. It may not—after all, that's how they've been trained—but we have to try to change their attitudes, anyway. These kids have never been singled out for praise or help in a regular classroom, and it's about time. Some of them will remember that someone cared enough to pay attention to them and tried to help them. In the one-on-one situation, discipline is not as much a problem as it is in the classroom. It may be that none of this will have any lasting effect, but all of us can remember at least one person who had a profound influence on our lives even though we knew them only a short time. The Corps could bring about a whole new way to assess the qualifications of teachers. And at the very least, if we can each help to keep just one child off the welfare rolls, it will pay for the whole program."

Reaction to the efforts of the Teacher Corpsmen in the schools where they are working varies from welcome approval to thinly veiled hostility. In a great many instances, regular teachers are resentful and unco-operative; the principals of the schools in the program seem a little more willing to give the experiment a fair trial. At one all-Negro school where a single white Corpsman is working, the principal and teachers seem genuinely pleased with what is taking place. The principal would like to have a full team of Corpsmen



Reaction to the efforts of the Teacher Corpsmen . . . varies from welcome approval to thinly veiled hostility.

to help Tom Johnson, the man who is there now, and one of the teachers says approvingly, "I think Tom's got something good going."

Tom Johnson thinks so too. In a dingy little room adjacent to the school's gymnasium, he was working with an uncommunicative second-grader, half shouting above the racket emanating from a physical education class on the other side of the cardboard-thin wall. In the course of a 45-minute period, he had coaxed the little girl into a word exercise, using blackboard and chalk, a comic book and a box full of cutout words and letters to accomplish the task. She began to hum and then sing softly while she searched for words she knew in the box of cutouts, and Tom gently urged her on with words of praise and encouragement. When the period was over the little girl left reluctantly.

Talking to Tom Johnson is an experience in itself. He is a 28-year-old Arkansas farm boy with a wife and two children, a seemingly endless amount of patience and complete dedication to his work. "Self-concept is what I work on most," he says, "because that's something they won't lose, once they have it. The rest of what they need will come along. I think I'm making a lot of inroads. I'm not satisfied, but we're getting somewhere." What will he do when his Teacher Corps duties are over? "I'm willing to bet he'll stay right here at this school," says Bill Osborne.

Wherever the Arkansas Corpsmen are assigned, their presence has caused an interruption of the *status quo*, and Osborne is convinced the effect will be favorable, given time to become established. In a hallway corner or an empty cafeteria or a converted coatroom or outside under a tree, the Corpsman meets for 30 minutes or an hour with a "problem" child. Those meetings, however much immediate good they do, are not lost on the child, his teacher or the Corpsman himself. The Corpsman can rely on the coaching and guidance of his master teacher, and in the more favorable situations where teachers and principals also join the team, there appears to be a real opportunity for improving on the approaches of the past.

Bill Osborne, who at 39 has a Ph.D. in psychology and eight years' experience in both colleges and public schools, has found in the Teacher Corps his biggest challenge. "It's like opium," he says. "It just gets to you." With candor he describes conditions in education which he feels make such programs as the Teacher Corps necessary:

"American education is in bad shape. We fear change. Look at the problems of certification and consolidation, at the resistance to television and team teaching and all the other innovations. I'm not saying any of them are perfect, but how else can we improve? State and local governments could have solved some of these problems years ago; now it's too late. Federal support is essential. There is a revolution going on in American education, and it's being financed by the federal government. Without it, there would be no special education programs, no counseling and guidance, no strong programs in languages, no education of the disadvantaged, no desegregation. Until the government got into education, this was the only industry in the United States that was growing willy-nilly, with no planning or research or open-minded view of change."

To his list of programs initiated by the federal government, Osborne could have added the Teacher Corps. How much it contributes to the "revolution" in education, if Congress lets it live, is up to Corpsmen like Tom Johnson. Can he offer *permanent* help to needy youngsters? Can he *really* get very far working with just one student at a time? Can he become *truly* accepted as a member of a school faculty? With unshakable faith, Tom has a four-word answer to all these questions:

"You can't discourage me." ○